

Judge threatens supporters of Philadelphia transit strikers

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US District Judge Eduardo Robreno denounced locomotive engineers and other railway workers for honoring the picket lines set up by striking Philadelphia transit workers at the city's suburban railway depots Monday morning. Denouncing their action as an illegal sympathy strike, the judge ordered members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and other railway unions back to work within hours after officials from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) sought an injunction.

On June 1, 5,200 workers, members of Transport Workers Union Local 234, struck SEPTA shutting down the subway, trolley and bus lines which serve nearly half a million passengers daily. On Monday morning TWU strikers picketed railways that link the city and suburbs, which were not previously affected by the strike.

Locomotive engineers, members of the BLE, as well as conductors from the United Transportation Union, refused to cross their picket lines, shutting down service for some 45,000 riders. SEPTA had added more cars to the suburban lines as a means of undermining the effectiveness of the strike.

Following the judge's ruling TWU Local President Steve Brookens ordered the pickets down, but said he did not rule out the possibility of setting up pickets elsewhere.

SEPTA officials, backed by Democratic Mayor Ed Rendell, have threatened to use management and nonunion personnel to operate subways and trolleys if the strike continues. SEPTA is demanding 47 different concessions from workers, including the addition of more part-time employees and the reduction in health insurance benefits. SEPTA is also seeking to privatize parts of the transit system, the fourth largest in the US.

The strike is SEPTA's second in three years and the

fifth since a 44-day walkout in 1977. The union's last strike, in March 1995, lasted two weeks.

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